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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420

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In Reply Refer To: 136

April 11, 2003

PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION LETTER

CLEARANCE OF VOLUNTEERS FOR DRIVING ASSIGNMENTS

1. This Environmental Medicine Information Letter provides information to clinical and administrative staff involved in the process of clearing volunteers for driving assignments.
2. Employees of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) transport patients in motor vehicles after appropriate medical clearance examinations. As large numbers of veteran patients are without personal transportation opportunities, VHA relies heavily on volunteers to transport them. Although the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defined suggested content of such medical examinations (Standard Form (SF) 71), OPM did not define actual criteria for driver clearance in their Official Form (OF) 345, Physical Fitness Inquiry for Motor Vehicle Operators (see website <http://vaww.ceosh.med.va.gov/Forms/OccHealth/of-345.dot>). Rather, the elements, but not the criteria, are listed. In general, OPM does define both elements and criteria for exclusion or clearance for jobs, but did not do so in this case. Voluntary Service has published VHA Handbook 1620.2, Voluntary Service Procedures, which in part addresses the issue of Volunteer Driver Safety. "A facility and/or a Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) with a Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) is required to administer physical examinations and health screenings for volunteer drivers that parallel the physical examinations and health screenings required for wage-grade van drivers, on a regular basis, at the local facility and/or VISN."
3. Because of incomplete policy development, current practices across VHA vary. In some facilities, local bargaining agreements have implemented the full Department of Transportation (DOT) programs except for the drug-testing components. In others, no written, formal program exists. As a result, safeguards in VHA for patients and employees are inconsistent and incomplete.
4. In response to concerns raised by both Veterans Service Organizations, occupational health clinicians, and recent events, a group of subject matter experts convened to re-examine Volunteer Driver physicals. Reports of volunteer applicants being declined for duties as drivers were reviewed and a survey of ten facilities identified that, on average, 80 percent were cleared to drive and 20 percent were refused clearance. Still, just as commercial standards are more stringent than those of a drivers' license for personal use, so must the physical standards for drivers involved in transporting VHA's veteran patients also derive from a stricter standard than those for private use.
5. In recognition of the existing policy gaps, a listing of potentially exclusionary factors was compiled to promote consistency and the safety of both veteran patients and volunteer drivers

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and to clarify decision-making criteria missing in OPM OF 345 (see Att. A). This listing was developed after a review of DOT guidelines for commercial drivers licenses, and after a review of usual approaches in the private sector. It is provided as guidance and explanation, and to allow clinician flexibility. It is not intended to mandate specific action or strict enforcement of any absolute criteria. It is not meant to supplant State laws or Federal action.

6. Still, VHA affirms its commitment to patient and occupational safety in the service of veterans, and recognizes that these criteria are widely used. VHA understands that reliance on this listing may preclude some volunteers from performing transportation duties. **NOTE:** *Such exclusion in no way undervalues the contribution that all volunteers can, and do, make to the delivery of health care. VHA is grateful for their participation, and acknowledges that every effort is made to identify suitable and meaningful alternative assignments for volunteers that are unable to serve as drivers.*

7. **Recommendations.** Although existing policies establishing the criteria for recruitment and assignment of volunteer drivers remain in effect, the following actions are recommended for incorporation into local policies and practices. It is recommended that:

a. Volunteer Drivers will not be cleared if the employee health clinical provider deems that they are not suitable after considering the criteria listed in Attachment A.

b. Volunteers who are disqualified from driving need to be referred back to their treating provider wherever possible for further medical evaluation. **NOTE:** *In a letter addressed to the applicant only, the applicant needs to be informed with the Occupational Health information concerning the reason(s) for non-acceptance as a volunteer driver.*

c. Volunteers who are non-accepted as a volunteer driver receive a letter from Voluntary Service thanking them for volunteering, and informing them that they may re-apply if their health condition changes.

d. The facility or VISN VTN Coordinator needs to ensure that all Volunteer Driver Applicants are referred to Occupational Health for clearance prior to the assignment of driving duties. **NOTE:** *The facility or VISN office with responsibility for Occupational Health work can assist with this endeavor.*

8. Questions regarding this information letter may be addressed to Occupational Health Program (136) at (202) 273-8459.

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Attachment

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ATTACHMENT A

**CLARIFICATION TO OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT (OPM)
OFFICIAL FORM (OF) 345**

1. The following is a clarification the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Official Form 345, Physical Fitness Inquiry for Motor Vehicle Operators, currently in wide use across the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Follow-up physical examination, testing, or other appropriate action, including denial of driving duties, may be indicated.

***NOTE:** A diagnosis of any of the following medical conditions may not necessarily result in the declination of a volunteer as a driver as the qualification is made on an individual basis after a review of all appropriate medical documentation from the volunteer candidate's primary care or other provider.*

2. Criteria that clinicians may consider when deciding if a volunteer is medically qualified as a driver include:

- a. **Vision.** Vision needs to be 20/40 or better in each eye with or without correction.
- b. **Hearing Loss.** Hearing loss needs to be no greater than an average of 40dB at 500, 1000, and 2000 HZ in the better ear with or without hearing aids.
- c. **Diabetes.** A clinical diagnosis of diabetes mellitus should generally not require insulin for control.
- d. **Substance Abuse.** The applicant with a history of substance abuse needs to provide documentation of being followed in a treatment program and documentation of abstinence for 1 year is provided.
- e. **Epilepsy.** There is no history or clinical diagnosis of epilepsy.
- f. **Range of Motion of Head and Neck.** There needs to be more than 45 degrees of rotation to both right and left.
- g. **Hypertension.** Hypertension needs to be under control with blood pressure no greater than 180 over 105.
- h. **Syncope.** Syncope, except when postural hypotension is found to be the cause, is absent.
- i. **Ischemia.** There is no clinical diagnosis of Ischemia, as evidenced by stress test.
- j. **Ventricular Arrhythmias.** There is no current clinical diagnosis of ventricular arrhythmias, excluding random Premature Ventricular Contractions.

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k. **Pacemaker.** Every 6 months the applicant needs to provide documentation that it is functioning adequately.

l. **Heart Block.** There is no current clinical diagnosis of a complete heart block, or new bundle branch block.

m. **Critical Aortic Stenosis.** The applicant needs to provide documentation of an evaluation by a cardiologist.

n. **Ejection Fraction.** Ejection fraction needs to be greater than 40 percent.

o. **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD).** A clinical diagnosis of moderate to severe COPD with a FEV 1 of less than 60 percent is considered a disqualifying condition.

p. **Narcolepsy and/or Sleep Apnea.** The applicant needs to provide documentation of adequate treatment as confirmed by sleep study needs.

q. **Neuromuscular Impairments.** The applicant needs to be able to coordinate all four extremities.

r. **Stroke.** A clinical diagnosis of a cerebral vascular accident is considered a disqualifying condition.

s. **Meniere's Disease.** Unstable or active Meniere's Disease is considered a disqualifying condition.

t. **Intra-Atrial Conduction Delay (IACD).** A clinical diagnosis of IACD is considered a disqualifying condition.

***NOTE:** Many facilities report including in the process a Driver test under observation to confirm the applicant's physical ability to control the vehicle.*